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BIG BOOTS BOB THE FIRE-LADDIE



OR, THE

DANDY DETECTIVE'S DOUBLE-UP.

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CHAPTER I.

A FIRE.—A CLUE.

A YOUNG man about twenty years of age, who had come up Park Row at a quick pace, was just turning into the Bowery, when he was accosted by a most unique nondescript.

"GREAT HOKUS! BUT YOU ARE IN A FIX, BOSS!" CRIED BIG BOOTS BOB.

It was a stubby boy, with a round, merry and pleasing face, set with a pair of keen, intelligent eyes; but first noticeable was his odd attire. He had on man's boots, a big man's at that, and was anchored fast in them in a queer fashion. Besides the boots, there was not a great deal of the fellow.

Straps, after the manner of suspenders, led over his shoulders from front to rear, crossing behind, and the ends were secured to the pull-straps of the boots on each side. The office of these straps was to keep the boots on, of course, but it looked as if they were intended more to hold the boy securely in the boots, as above suggested.

He had on a blue shirt, ragged at the sleeves, his arms being bare to the elbows; an apology for a vest, open and flapping to the breeze, and even less of an apology for a hat.

The young man first mentioned was as sleek and polished as a new pin. He was rather good-looking, with black hair and eyes and a neat mustache, and carried a lithe cane with a ball on the end. His attire was of the best, from crown to sole, and yet he was not flash.

"Hello, Satin Sam!" the boy exclaimed. "Hello, Bobby Big Boots!" was pleasantly acknowledged.

"I'd give you my hand, Slick," the boy added, "but it would stain yer glove."

"You needn't stop for that, Bob," was the rejoinder. "I'll shake hands with you anywhere and at any time."

And he frankly put out his neatly gloved hand as he spoke.

But the boy drew back.

"No, I won't spile yer kid," he declared. "I'll take yer good 'tention the same as a handshake. But, where goin' at sech a gait?"

"Just as you say, Bob. Why, I am going up the Bowery here a little way, that is all. Where are you heading for in that style? You must take care those boots don't run away with you."

They both laughed lightly.

Several persons had turned their heads to look back at them, after passing, for there could not have been a wider difference in the appearance of the two.

It was a matter of surprise to see so well dressed a young man talking with such a freak as Big Boots Bob. And, of surprise the more, that they appeared to be on such intimate terms.

"Never you mind them boots," rejoined the boy. "I have got tight reins on them, you see. I'm goin' around to the engine house to help wipe up the steamer, and lug some coal out of the hole for the boys. They are flooded there again, and it takes Big Boots Bob to—"

But he cut short suddenly.

A sharp clang, above every other sound, was heard at that instant.

The boy evidently recognized it immediately, for he wheeled like a flash, and sprang to the curb.

A fire engine was at hand, horses running, and men and women were making a lively scramble to get out of the way. It was an exciting moment for all who were near.

Big Boots Bob turned quickly to his friend, shouting:

"See you later, Satin Sam! Here comes the steamer and the boys, goin' to a fire! I can't miss that, you know."

He waved his hand and sprang out into the street, just as the engine came along, and, with a quick move, displaying the agility of a cat, in spite of the big boots, he caught hold behind the engine and got a footing.

His face was all aglow with excitement.

The young man smiled as he looked on,

but in almost the same moment a woman's scream was heard.

Turning quickly to look, he saw a young woman lying on the pavement, where she had been knocked down by a frightened horse, and the horse rearing directly over her!

Two leaps, quick as thought, and the young man had hold of the bit, with a grip like iron, and with a display of muscle that must have been a surprise to many, he jerked the horse half around, forcing it back at the same time, and its feet came to the ground.

Even as it was, the ironed hoofs barely missed the lady, and only for the young man's prompt action she must have been killed.

The young man did not stop at that. Stooping instantly, he caught hold of the young woman, lifted her with apparent ease, and in a second had her safely out of harm's reach.

The crowd cheered, and more than one face had blanched.

Somehow, the young man appeared to have grown several inches during those few brief moments. He seemed taller and broader, and there was that in his look which bespoke strength still in reserve.

And, too, he was as cool as if he had merely rendered the lady the slightest service imaginable.

As for the young woman, she was too weak to stand.

"Are you badly hurt?" the young man inquired, supporting her. "Shall I take you into this store?"

It had happened in front of a respectable-looking store.

"N—no," was the faint response. "I am more frightened than really hurt. I would like a cab—"

The young man looked quickly about.

The fire engine was now in the distance and vehicles were moving much as before.

As it happened, there was a cab near at hand, and he signalled the driver, who pulled in to the curb, when the young man aided the lady to get in, for which she thanked him.

"What is your name, please?" she asked.

"Why do you ask that?" he queried.

"I must see that you are properly thanked for so great—"

"Your good will sufficiently thanks me," politely lifting his hat. "What address shall I mention?"

"No. —, — avenue, if you please."

"And you need no further aid?"

"None, thank you."

The young man bowed and drew back, gave the cabman the direction, and the cab rolled away.

Satin Sam, to give him the name we have learned from the young gamin, looked after the vehicle for a few seconds, and then turned to proceed on his way.

Just as he did so, something on the ground caught his eye.

It was a bright, dull-glittering object, and he had to look a second time before he made out what it was.

He stooped and picked it up, and it proved to be a lady's card-case. Without a second look Sam turned in the direction the cab had taken, but it was then too far away to be hailed.

He looked again at the case.

He believed it had been dropped by the young woman he had rescued.

"Well, I can send it to her, knowing her address," he said to himself. "And I will not try to resist the temptation to learn her name, when it is so easily ascertained."

He had resumed his direction, and touching the spring of the case, the lid flew open.

Instead of cards, however, he found a folded paper, and this he drew out, in the

hope that at least one card might be concealed under it, and not in vain.

There were two or three cards, and the moment he glanced at the name an exclamation escaped him.

"Emeline Kemper!" he ejaculated. "The person of all others I wanted to find!"

Quickly, as if impelled by an important motive, he opened the paper he had first taken out of the case, and read it.

"What can it mean?" he questioned, with more of excitement than he had shown in the moment of peril. "The very house to which I have been summoned myself, and by the same person!"

Immediately he increased his pace, acting as if just reminded of something he had for the moment forgotten.

But that was not the case. He had forgotten nothing.

He closed the card-case, having replaced the cards in it, but the paper he put in his coat pocket.

Disposing of the case in another pocket, he swung his cane and stepped out at a still quicker stride, the same sleek young gentleman as when first discovered.

"Emeline Kemper, the heiress," he said further to himself. "What can this man Gleeson be to her that a note from him would bring her here, I wonder? Satin Sam, here is work for you, sure enough. Ha! the fire. It can't be many doors from that number. By Heavens!" in another moment, "I believe it is the very house!"

He was not mistaken; his guess was correct.

CHAPTER II.

SOMETHING PASSING STRANGE.

Big Boots Bob, the moment he caught hold upon the fire engine, felt a hand grab his shoulder.

It was that of a fireman, one of two who were standing on the rear footboard of the engine, and a cheery voice greeted the non-descript:

"Hello, Bob!" was the exclamation. "You are with us, hey?"

"You can bet yer brasswork, I am!" was the shouted response. "You can't get along without me at a fire!"

Big Boots Bob, Bob Handle by name, was well known to the firemen of the station to which this engine belonged. He was a fire waif, so to say, and the ambition of his life was to become a fireman.

He was quick, bright, and fearless, and was liked by all. He performed menial work about the station, for which he received his food and a place to sleep.

The engine went thundering and clanging along, and in a brief time reached the scene of the fire.

It was an old house, with a clothing shop on the ground floor.

In front of this was an old Jew, who was wringing his hands piteously and bewailing his misfortune.

"Mine shop! Mine stock!"

That was the burden of his lamentation. "Clothin' is goin' up, Old Hook Nose!" cried Big Boots Bob.

"Mine shop—mine stock! I sells the whole lot vor gost, spot cash this minute, and you dakes—"

"Out of the way, Solomon!" cried the fire chief. "Force the crowd back, officers!"

"Mine store! Mine stock! Save my—"

But he was hustled out of the way without ceremony, as the firemen made all haste to fight the element.

Some had already rushed into the house, axes in hand, others were running out the hose, while others still were putting up a ladder against the front of the burning building.

Smoke and flames were issuing from all of the upper windows in volume, and it looked as if the house were doomed.

Even ahead of the firemen had rushed Big Boots Bob. He was running for the hall entrance even as he spoke to the Jew, and he made no stop, but sprang in fearlessly.

Up the stairs he went, two steps at a time, his big boots clanking.

He made more noise than the former owner of the boots would have made in making the same ascent.

On the first landing all the doors were open, and it looked as if everybody had escaped. It was the same on the floor above, but Big Boots Bob did not stop for that.

By the time he turned to make the next flight the firemen had overtaken him, and he had to dodge aside to let them pass.

They ran on and made for the roof, opening the skylight with a blow with an axe.

When the boy reached the last floor he ran into a room.

It was almost like a furnace.

A glance around revealed that no one was there, and he was on the point of retreating, when he thought he heard a moan.

He listened.

Yes, there was no mistaking the sound, and he looked about even more carefully than he had done in the first instance, but no one was there.

A door, however, claimed his notice, because it was closed, and he sprang to that, through the heat and stifling smoke, but it was locked against him.

He shook it with all his strength.

Immediately he heard the moan repeated, and following it came something like a call for help.

But it was so faint that it could not have been heard out in the hall, and it had been by the merest chance that even Big Boots Bob had heard it at all. He grew alarmed.

Here was a human being locked in a room, and it was for him to save the life or die trying.

He cast a swift glance around for something with which to attack the door.

The object he selected was a most peculiar one.

The room was the kitchen of the floor, the house being a tenement, and near the stove stood a scuttle of coal.

Bob ran to that, grabbed it up, ran back to the door, and, swinging it with all his strength, he brought it with force against the door, near the lock, and the door was forced.

Instantly out poured a blinding volume of smoke.

For an instant Bob had to step back, and then taking a breath as well as he could, he darted in.

He still had the scuttle in hand, and, seeing a window, threw the scuttle with all his strength towards it, and it went crashing through, tearing both sash and shutters, and a draught of air rushed in.

Instantly he had thrown the half-emptied scuttle, the boy looked around.

He was startled.

Before him was a man bound fast to a chair, and the flames were just beginning to lick their way through and dart their tongues at him.

The draught of air had partly cleared the smoke for a moment, and had given the man a breath that revived him, and he and Big Boots Bob looked at each other in surprise for one brief second before either spoke.

The man was good-looking, with regular features and dark mustache, as Bob took note.

"Great hokus! but you are in a fix, boss!" the boy exclaimed.

"Yes, and for God's sake release me instantly!" was the response, in choked utterance.

Bob thrust his hand down into the leg of one of his boots and drew out about the worst-looking specimen of a knife ever seen, already opened, and leaped forward.

With a couple or three slashes he severed the cords that held the man's feet, and, with a little more care, but equally as hastily, freed his hands and arms and released him from the chair, when, to his amaze, the man sprang up and seized him by the back.

Before Big Boots could realize what was going to happen, it had happened.

The man had jerked him up and was running with him.

Out into the adjoining room and through in less time than it takes to tell of it, and out into the hall and down the stairs, through smoke and flame.

The delay of five minutes on that floor would have been fatal, for they were burned, even as it was. But they reached the second floor safely, and there the man dropped his burden.

"Great hokus!" the boy instantly exclaimed. "Be you a giant, mister?"

"No, but you are a pygmy," was the quick response. "And, see here, my lad, whoever you are!"

The words were exclaimed, the man holding Bob fast by the collar.

"Yes, I'm seein'," the boy said as quickly.

"You must not breathe a word of this to a living soul; do you understand what I am saying?"

"Yes, I know what you are sayin', boss, but hang me if I kin understand what you are drivin' at. If it was me, you bet I would—"

"But, it was not you. What's your name?"

"Bob Handle."

"I'll remember it. Where do you live?"

"At engine house No. —. I am one of the firemen, or am goin' to be—"

"Yes, yes; but let me do the talking, if you please. We have only a minute to stand here."

"Go it!"

"Will you promise not to tell what you know?"

"Great hokus! I must tell, boss! I have been dyin' to save a life, and now you—"

"Promise not to mention a word of how you found me in that room, or by your boots I swear I'll carry you back up there and pitch you into the flames."

The man's grip had tightened, and he seemed to mean what he said.

Big Boots Bob was never so amazed in his life. And, too, he was not a little frightened. Was the man crazy?

"Do you promise?" the man demanded, almost savagely, giving him a shaking.

"Y-y-yesser!" cried Bob, in a hurry, then. "I won't give it away, if you don't want me to, sir."

"See that you don't! You have told me your name, and where to find you, and you will repent it if you do. Save yourself, now; I am off. I couldn't leave you up there, after you had saved my life."

With that, the man darted down the stairs and was gone.

CHAPTER III.

MYSTERY OF MYSTERIES.

Big Boots Bob was never so amazed in his life.

He stood staring down the stairs, even after the man had disappeared, as if altogether unmindful of his danger.

The first he knew he heard steps thundering on the stairs above, the firemen came tearing along the hall, and one of them grabbed the boy by the neck and yanked him along.

"What are you standing here for?" the man demanded. "Don't you know the old crib is ready to fall?"

"Didn't know anything, just then," answered Big Boots Bob. "Was thinkin'."

"I thought you was sleepin'!"

As soon as Bob was aroused he was himself again, and needed no further help, and the fireman let go of him and he followed.

Out into the street they rushed, where the engines were puffing away and the other firemen were directing the streams of water into the doomed house, and where the old Jew was still wailing.

Bob looked around instantly to discover the mysterious man.

But he was nowhere to be seen.

Instead, he saw the sleek young man he had met only a little while before, whom he had called Satin Sam.

He ran to him immediately.

"Hello, fire rat!" he was greeted. "You had to risk your neck in there, did you?"

"That's nothin', Slick," was the hurried response. "Did you see him?"

"See who?"

"That man."

"The one that came out of the house bareheaded?"

"Yes; which way did he go?"

"Down the street there, and turned the corner to the right. Why do you ask? What's up?"

"That's what I want to find out, Slick. He would 'a' been up, by this time, if it hadn't been for me, and then he threatened to kill me if ever I told anything about it."

"The mischief!"

"That's jest it, Slick."

"You saved his life?"

"Sure pop!"

"And yet he threatened to kill if you told?"

"What he did."

"But he will never be able to find—"

"That is the doose of it, Slick. He made me tell him my name and where he could find me."

"Well, he is gone—Ha! In she goes!"

At that instant the building fell with a crash.

And as it fell, the old Jew waved his arms and let out an awful wail.

"That settles it, I guess," commented Big Boots Bob. "The boys have got the best of it, now."

"Well, you come with me. I want to talk with you, Bob."

"The way I look?"

"The way you look? You look all right, in my eyes, Bob."

"Well, you ain't no dude, like some fellers, Slick. You ain't too proud to speak to a chap."

"Were you too proud to save my life the way you did a year ago, my boy? I guess not, and you are a perfect cherub in my sight, since then, boots and all."

Big Boots Bob laughed and went off with his friend.

The beginning of their friendship has been explained in their own remarks, and need not be referred to again.

They turned from the Bowery into a quieter street.

"Now," said Satin Sam, "I want you to tell me all you saw in that house."

"Fire and smoke, that was all—"

"No nonsense; get right to business."

"Well, that was all, and no nonsense about it—'cept the man."

"And that is what I want you to tell me about."

"But I'm to be killed if I do!"

"Oh, pshaw! You can tell Satin Sam without danger of that, Bob. Give me the whole of it."

And so the boy did.

Satin Sam listened attentively to the end, which Bob was not long in reaching.

"Why could I not have known him?" Sam then muttered. "The very thing I was summoned here for, undoubtedly."

"What's that?"

"I say I was sent for, and it was to find that man in his bad fix, no doubt."

"Who sent for you?"

"Well, that could hardly interest you, Bob. Even if it did, it could hardly be of any benefit to me—"

"Don't you be too sure about that, Mebby I could help you?"

"Well, perhaps. The fact of the business is, Bob, I am working on one of the most puzzling cases I ever tackled, and it is one that is puzzling older and better detectives than I am, too. I would give anything if I could clear it up and come in ahead of them on the homestretch."

"Well, why don't ye?"

"Maybe for the reason that it is not in me."

"You git out! You are a star detective, and I'd bet my pile on you, if I had a pile to bet. But, I say, Slick, I'll tell you what we kin do that will win the race or bust."

"Well, what is it, Bob?"

"You and me go into it together."

"You? Why, what could you do?"

"Well, I've made up my mind to do something, and that is, to find out who that man was, how he came to be fastened the way I found him, and all about him, and I'll find out, you bet, or bust these boots."

"Well, that is the kind of talk I like to hear, anyhow, and that is just the work I would lay out for you if we did work together."

"Then it's a bargain, by hokus! You and me against the field."

"All right, Bob; I will take you, and we'll see what will come of it."

"Well, what's the case? As I'm in the combination now, you'd better tell me all about it, for then I can be the more use to you. If I hear or see anything 'portant I will recognize it fer such. See?"

"Well, store away these facts, then: Emeline Kemper, an heiress, has been mysteriously missing for some time. Her friends and relations have been looking everywhere to find her."

"I git that all right."

"The police and private detectives are on the case, and are all hustling to find her, for the reward offered is a stiff one. The girl's lover, a fellow named Dick Rice, has engaged me as his representative."

"Where he shows his hoss sense."

"Dick Rice has a rival for the girl's hand, and he rather suspects that this rival has had something to do with her disappearance; but, so far, I have not been able to find anything against him. My own suspicion is, that one Lyman Gunter, the next heir after Emeline, is the one at the bottom of it all, but I have not been able to fasten anything upon him."

"We'll fetch him, though, Slick, if our boots stay on—"

"There is a mysterious unknown who is playing a hand in the game, who calls himself Andrew Gleason, but who he is I do not know. I got a note from him bidding me come to No. — Bowery, and when I got there what should I find but a big fire. And, too, I know that Emeline Kemper was sent for by the same man to come to the same place at the same time. Now, if you can help me unwind such a tangle as that, you will do well, and I will reward you. But my opinion is that it will stump us."

CHAPTER IV.

BADLY BAFFLED.

Big Boots Bob had listened attentively. It was a strange story, and doubtful

whether he grasped it, even that part of it that was reasonably clear.

The young detective himself scarcely understood it—in fact, he did not understand it, but to a certain point it was clear enough as a case.

Bob scratched his head.

"That is a corker, Slick, sure enough,"

"And that is why I say it is likely to stump us. I am afraid it is too thick for our spoons."

"Well, we can make a try at it, anyhow, and will make a bulge in it some'r's, sure, pop! I wasn't cut out fer a detective; I am goin' to be a fireman or nothin'; but, fer what I am worth I am in this thing with you right up to my nose! But, I say, Slick, how did you know that the missin' heiress had been sent for to come to this same burning house?"

Slick smiled at the inquiry and proceeded to relate the particulars of the rescue of the young lady and the finding of her card case with the cards in it.

"Great hokus!" Big Boots Bob exclaimed, "you have got a bulge on the case a'ready, Slick! You know where the young woman hangs out, now, and all you have got to do is go and scoop her in and do the grand tableau!"

"Only her name is on the cards, Bob; not her address."

Big Boots Bob's face fell at that, and he scratched his head again.

"I tell you it is no easy game to play," the young detective declared, "and if we win it will be by luck."

"Might as well count me out of it."

"No, I count you in it. And now, listen to me. I want you to take pains to find out who that man was, if you get sight of him, or can get on the track of him any way, and also to learn the mystery of that burned house."

"I'll do it, or make a big try of it."

"That is your work, now, Bob. You know where to reach me, and if you learn anything, do not fail to let me know."

They parted and Bob ran back in the direction of the fire, slumping along in his big boots to the amusement of all who saw him.

Satin Sam continued on through the street in a thoughtful mood.

"It will be useless, but I must follow it up, I suppose," he mused. "Now that I know Emeline Kemper is a free woman, right here in New York, it is plain she is hiding. And that being the case, the address she gave me, for the cabman, was false—"

He stopped short.

"Was it false?" he asked himself. "She could not know that I was a detective, and at that time I did not know her name. One of the queer things of the case is, that this young woman never had a photograph taken. That is something out of the usual, for not one woman in a hundred, with means, but has had her picture taken a score of times."

He changed his course to discover if possible what was in the address which the young woman had given to the cabman.

"This man, Andrew Gleason, is another riddle," he meditated. "I must run him down, also. How he can know of me, and be directing me, and at the same time know where Miss Kemper is and influence her movements at will, quite mystifies me. I must run out that trail, too."

Satin Sam was now up to work—his detective wit all on the alert, and he at length reached the number designated to find that the dwelling was a hard-looking one, and under it a shop of some kind.

After a sharp scrutiny of the premises, the detective entered this shop.

It proved to be kept by a Dutchman,

and was something of a general store on a small scale.

The proprietor looked over his spectacles with surprise at seeing such a customer as this coming in, for most of those who darkened his doors were housewives of the neighborhood.

Slick made known his errand and received a negative reply; no such young woman had ever lived in that house. No cab had been near the store all day. It was plain that he had been deceived.

To make doubly sure, the young detective spent some time in the neighborhood, making close inquiries, but in the end was only the more thoroughly convinced that he had been deceived.

And yet he was not altogether convinced, either, and he took a new tack immediately.

Half an hour later found him at the door of the missing young woman's home.

Shown into the library, he was soon joined by an elderly gentleman with clean shaved face and gold spectacles.

"Ah! You, sir?" he was greeted.

"As you see, Mr Randall," the response.

"And do you bring us news?"

"Yes, and no."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, I have seen your ward, but have lost her again."

"What? You have seen her?"

The man almost bounced out of the chair into which he had just settled himself for the interview.

"Yes, sir; I have seen her—"

"But lost her again! You had no business to lose her, sir!"

"I quite agree with you, and certainly would not have done so, but I did not know it was she until later."

"Well, well; here is a queer statement. How did you know at all that it was Miss Kemper, then? If you found out that, you must have been close on the secret."

"Yes, I believe I was, sir, and that is what I want to confirm. Would you be able to identify a card-case owned by Miss Kemper, were you to see it? And, I will describe her again to you, and see if I give a good likeness of the missing lady."

"Her card-case!" exclaimed the man, nervously; "I would know it at a glance, young man!"

CHAPTER V.

CALLING OUT THE SPOTTER.

Satin Sam had taken the object from his pocket while speaking.

He held it covered in his hand, however, until he finished, and had heard the reply; now he disclosed it.

"It is her's!" the man exclaimed, instantly. "Where did you get it?"

"I picked it up, two minutes after she had dropped it, and would have restored it to her, but she was out of reach by that time."

"And you saw her drop it?"

Sam explained enough to make the point clear, and followed it with a description of the young woman.

"It was she! it must have been she!" the man exclaimed. "Oh! you rascals! why did you let her elude you like that?"

"You are too fast, sir. Let me explain: When I picked the case up I had no idea the young woman was Miss Kemper. I glanced after the cab, and seeing that it was some distance off, thought I could send the case to her address just as well. When I opened it, and learned her name, then the cab was out of sight."

"Well, that throws it in a little different light, and I beg your pardon; but, why do they put such young men as you on such important cases?"

"Whom do you mean by 'they'?"

"The police, of course."

"Well, it happens that the police have nothing to do with putting me, sir," as Satin Sam rose to go. "I am an independent detective, going it alone; a little too young, perhaps, but old enough to get there, if the way opens."

"Hold on, sir!" for Sam was moving to the door.

"Well, what is it, Mr. Randall?"

"How came you upon the case at all, if the police did not employ you?"

"An individual employed my services, sir, or otherwise I would not have an interest in it."

"An individual? Who was he?"

"I prefer not to state, sir."

"Yes; but I prefer that you shall, young man," and the man took a step towards him, with his arm outstretched, and immediately continued:

"I forbid you, sir, to leave this room until you have disclosed all you know! Do you understand me? I say I forbid!"

"Yes, I heard you say it, sir, but it does not hold good with me."

"We'll see about that! I command you—"

"There! there! You are needlessly exciting yourself, sir," said Sam, placidly. "If I am a young man, you will find that I am too old to be scared easily. I have nothing further to disclose to you."

"I want to know by whom you are employed."

"And I will not tell you."

"You gave me to infer, on the occasion of your other visit, that you were one of the police—"

"If you drew that inference, sir, it was no fault of mine; what I said was, that I was a detective trying to recover your missing ward for you. I will bid you good-day."

The other was baffled.

"Well, well, if you will not tell there must be a reason," he said, in what seemed a mollified tone. "But, you will not fail to let me know what success you meet with?"

"If I find the young lady, you will certainly know that."

"Yes; but your success. You might find the very clew that the police could make use of with success—"

"As to that, sir, the police will find their own clews, and I will do the same. I do not work with the police, nor against them. I am simply independent."

"Mighty independent, I should say."

The man turned his back upon Satin Sam, who had already opened the door and stepped out.

No sooner had he gone, than a fierce look came into the face of the man he had just left, and, wheeling, he shook his fist at the door through which the youthful detective had disappeared.

"Curse you!" he hissed. "I'll see about your case later!"

As Sam turned away from the house, a new suspicion had been formed.

"There is something under it all that has not appeared on top yet, I am sure of that," he decided. "The more I think of it, the more I suspect that I have been doubly taken in. The only square man in the whole batch is that fellow Rice; I am certain of him."

He turned his steps toward the fire engine station, evidently having more fully matured his plans.

Arriving there, he entered, and all who stood around looked at him with something of amaze.

"Hello, chappie," one of the firemen exclaimed. "Guess you are lost."

"I guess not," was the firm, cool response. "Have you a boy around here anywhere called Big Boots Bob?"

"Why, yes, he is here. But what on earth do you want with him?"

"Want to see him for a few minutes' talk. Where will I find him?"

"Well, you won't want to go where he is, in them clothes, so I will call him up. He is below in the water, fishin' out coal for us."

One of their number went to a hole in the rear of the room, where he shouted down into the depths underneath, and in due time Big Boots Bob appeared in all his dirt.

Satin Sam held out his hand to him frankly.

"I wanted to see you, Bob," he said, "and thought I would call at your office in business hours."

The firemen laughed.

"Glad to see you," answered Bob, "but you can't shake hands with me; I am mighty p'tic'lar who I shake with! Reckon you want to see me on business. Want to buy my Fifth av'noo mansion?"

He wiped his hands on a piece of waste while speaking, and moved with Sam toward the doors.

"I have got work for you," said Sam, in a lower tone.

"What is it?"

"I want you to find the girl I told you about. As she knows me by sight, she can play me off, but she can't fool you worth a cent. I am of the opinion that she couldn't have given me that address off-hand the way she did, unless she had it in mind, and I believe our clew is right there."

"Jes' as like as not," agreed Bob.

CHAPTER VI.

REWARD AND THREATS.

They had stepped outside the doors of the engine house while talking.

Within, the firemen were wondering who the princely-looking young man could be, and what business he could possibly have with their Fire Laddie.

"And I want you to find that young lady," Satin Sam summed up.

"Yes; but how'm I to do it?" inquired Bob.

"By spotting the neighborhood."

"Yes; but I never seen her."

"You must find her by description, or by this card-case."

"Mebby I kin do it with that, but a word fotygraff don't 'press me as bein' worth a whole lot."

"Maybe not. But you will certainly know the man you rescued in the burning house?"

"Well, some, you bet!"

"Possibly you will get onto him in the same neighborhood."

"Or he will git onto me, hey? I tell you I feel oneasy when I think of that man, Slick."

"Why? Because he threatened to wind you up?"

"Yes; and as I have told, against his orders, you know that means an ugly mug for me."

"Don't meet trouble till you come to it, Bob, is my advice."

"When do you want me to begin this spottin' business? I have got more work to do here."

"Finish your work, and then take it up."

"Can't 'ford to miss my chance of p'motion, you see, for I am bound to be a fireman or bust!"

"Time enough for that. You have got to eat another barrel or two of flour before you will fill those boots you wear, and you won't be a fireman till you can do that."

"Well, to biz; give me the straight sig-

nal, so I will know where to find the blaze when I run my engine out."

"All right, listen to me."

Satin Sam thereupon talked earnestly with his ally for some moments, and Big Boots Bob frequently signified with nods that he understood.

As they were about parting, a colored boy came running up, and was about to enter the engine house when he caught sight of Bob.

"Say!" he called out, stopping short.

"Well, say it, coon," invited Bob.

"Yo' jes' look out who yo'm callin' coon, or I done sot down on yo' wush-bone fo' yo'!"

"There is not enough of you for that," rejoined Bob.

"I sho' ye, yo' go callin' me names any mo'."

"Well, what do you want?"

"Be yo' Big Boots Bob?"

"That's me."

"I thought so; yo' boots caught my eye."

"Well, what do you want with me, Chocolate?"

"Now you look heah! I ain't goin' fo' to be called any sich names—"

"Great hokus! You don't know when a feller is payin' you a compliment. Chocolate is sweet—"

"Better cut it short and see what he wants," whispered Satin Sam.

"Well, 'scuse me," said Bob. "What do you want with me, my colored brother, but not brother-in-law?"

"I hab done fotch yo' dis heah letter," and he extended the closed and sealed envelope.

Big Boots Bob took the missive and tore it open hastily.

He could read and write after a fashion, having acquired 'nose accomplishments by dint of hard study at odd moments.

"Any answer wanted?" he asked.

"Any—Great hokus!"

Out of the letter dropped a couple of new, crisp bank notes, and Bob looked the amazement he felt.

The eyes of the little darkey, too, stuck out like a pair of electric buttons in the midst of a black panel, and his mouth dropped open at the sight.

"Fo' goodness!" he exclaimed. "I didn't know dey was mon in it!"

"Jest as well ye d'nd't," averred Bob, quickly gathering them up. "Great hokus! They are a pair o' X's, sure as I live!"

"An' yo' didn't gib me time to tell you all," muttered the little darkey.

"What more had you to tell?"

"De boss said you don' mus' open it whar anybody seen yo do it."

"Oh, that don't matter. If there is no answer wanted you can go. I'm a whole heap 'bliged to you."

"An' I only got fify cents fer fotchin' all dat mon!" the little darkey muttered, as he turned to go.

"It is from him," said Satin Sam, eagerly.

He had snatched the paper from Bob's hand as Bob stooped to pick up the money.

"From who?" asked Bob.

"The man you rescued. I am after this young coon, like a hound after game. You do what I told you."

"All right."

Satin Sam moved off at once in the direction the little darkey had taken, and did not mean to lose sight of him.

"Great hokus!" exclaimed Bob, as he looked at the money, and fondled it. "Never was so rich in my life! Reckon I'll soon be a member of the Astor family if I keep on."

For the moment he even forgot the note that had come with the money.

"Let's see what he has ter say, though," he suddenly bethought him, and he stuffed the money into a pocket and gave attention to the missive.

It read like this:

"Big Boots Bob—Here is something for the great service you have rendered me, and at the same time something that will help you to hold your tongue, I hope. Unless you do that, look out for squalls.

"THAT MAN."

It took the boy a couple of minutes to figure it all out, for the writing was none too excellent, and when he had done so he drew a long whistle.

"Yes, I have got to look out fer squalls, that is a fact," he said to himself. "Here I have gone and blabbed the whole business to Slick. But, then, he is a detective, and it will be all right. Anyhow, I hope it will."

He put the letter in his pocket and entered the engine house again.

"Who was that, Bob?" one of the firemen asked.

"Friend o' mine," answered the Fire Laddie.

"Is he a prince?"

"You bet he is!"

"But, no fooling, who is he?"

"Well, I saved his life, oncet, and he has come to thank me fer it."

"Oh! Is that the feller you have told us about before? Wondered what he had in common with a rat like you."

Bob answered all their questions in his own way, and went about his work, and kept at it until he had finished, which was something like an hour later.

Having done, he proceeded to wash up.

Finally, he appeared a different looking boy entirely from what he had been, for he was clean, had on a whole coat, and had discarded the big boots for a pair of shoes that were nearer his proper size; and in place of the miserable hat, wore now a cap that became him.

Giving some excuse as to where he was going, he left the station.

"Great hokus! But I feel rich!" he exclaimed, as he felt the money in his pocket. "I have a notion to go an' book fer Your-up, and let folks know there is such a feller as me!"

And he held his head as high as if the money in his pocket had been two hundred thousand dollars, and himself a scion of royal blood.

"But, biz first," he decided, coming down from his flight. "When that is done with I will treat myself to a ride to Harlem or a voyage to Jersey. I am bound to do somethin' on top of all this good luck, if I have to go and buy a postage stamp of Uncle Sam."

In due time he was at his destination.

What he was going to do, he hardly knew himself, but there he was, and he looked around.

He had barely taken his bearings, so to say, when a heavy hand grabbed him by the collar; he was jerked clear off the ground, and, in the next moment, the door of a house closed upon him with a bang. He was a prisoner.

CHAPTER VII.

SEEKING FOR PROOFS.

Meantime what of Satin Sam.

And who was this Satin Sam, anyhow? the reader may ask.

Well, in a measure we have told who he was; a young detective working on his own merit.

He was a young man of some means, who had taken up detective work because he had a liking for it, and because he seemed to be adapted to it.

The name he wore had been applied to him because of his ever slick and shiny appearance in dress.

The detective followed the little darky without being suspected, and finally came to the place that was evidently his destination—a street corner, where the darky stopped and looked around as if disappointed at not being able to find some one whom he had expected to meet there.

Satin Sam watched him for a moment, until he was sure of his guess; then he crossed the street and approached the corner at a quick pace, and purposely collided with the boy.

"Wha' yo' doin'?" the boy demanded.

"Didn't see you for your shadow," answered Slick, hastily.

"Den yo' had better turn out when yo' see my shadder de nex' time," was the prompt rejoinder.

By that time Satin Sam had stopped short.

He did so as if suddenly recognizing the boy, and hastened to ask:

"Say, sonny?"

"Well, say it, sah."

"Are you not the same fellow who was around to the fire engine house a few minutes ago?"

"Guess I be, boss, an' yo' is de same pusson I done seen dah."

"Yes, you are right. Did you lose anything?"

The boy clapped his hand to his pocket quicker than a wink, a blank look on his face, but instantly that look vanished.

"No, I ain' los' him, boss," he declared.

"Lost what?"

"Dat haff dollar."

"Well, here is another to keep it company, then."

He tossed a coin to the boy, who caught it deftly, and was immediately jingling the two together in his pocket.

"What did you gib me dat for?" he asked.

"I want you to answer a question or two."

"All right."

"Who was it sent you to the engine house?"

"A man."

"What kind of a man?"

"Big man, with nice mustache."

"Where did you see him?"

"Right heah on dis cornah, sah."

"And you expected to find him here when you came back?"

"Yes, sah. But why am you askin' me all dese yere questions?"

"That man is a friend of mine, and I want to find him."

"How you know he was?"

"Knew his writing."

"Oh! shua 'nuff."

"Then it was his own writing on the note, eh?"

"I speck it was, boss."

"Don't you know, then?"

"No; didn't see him done it."

Sam had hoped that he might get proof on that point; but it was altogether likely that the man had written it himself.

"Well, can you find him for me?" he asked.

"No, sah; don't know nuffin' 'bout him now. He told me come right back to dis yeah cornah an' report, but he ain' heah."

It was as plain as day that nothing was to be learned in this direction, so he left that street, and ere long was out upon Broadway, his steps down-townward.

Before he had gone two blocks he was touched on the shoulder lightly, and the detective looked up quickly.

"Ha! You, Mr. Rice?" he greeted.

"Yes, sir. Was just going to your office."

"And I am on my way there to keep the appointment with you."

"What have you been able to learn?"

"Nothing that is of importance, although I may say that I have seen Miss Kemper."

"You have seen her? Good! Tell me where she is, I pray!"

"I cannot do that. I saw her, but she escaped me before I was aware that it was she."

"And I had every hope——"

"Keep right on hoping. I think there will be light ahead pretty soon now, Mr. Rice."

They entered a building, mounted a flight of stairs, and were comfortably ensconced in a neat private office.

"Now, tell me all about it," the client requested.

"That I will do, and then I must ask you some questions. There is a deeper mystery here than we ever dreamed of, I believe, Mr. Rice."

"I care nothing for that if you can only restore the lady to me alive and unharmed. That is the important part of all."

"And that I hope to do. Now, hear the story, as far as it goes."

Thereupon the young detective told about the accident to the young woman on the Bowery, and the events following.

"Describe her," Mr. Rice eagerly requested. "Describe her to me."

This was done.

"It was she," the lover exclaimed. "Oh! if you had only known it was she, all might now be cleared."

"Well, if it was she, the mystery is only doubled, Mr. Rice."

"How is that?"

"Do you not see? She is not detained anywhere against her will, but has hidden herself willingly; that must be understood."

"My God! so she has!"

"And why is she doing that?"

"I do not know; I cannot understand."

"Nor can I. Now, have you any knowledge of a man named Andrew Gleeson?"

"Never heard of him, sir."

"Well, I will put it to the test in another way. You may possibly be able to recognize his handwriting."

"Possibly."

"Here is a specimen of it."

He showed the note he had received from that mysterious person.

The young client took it, and studied it well, reading it over several times before handing it back.

It was worded thus:

"Sam Kennedy, Detective—You want to get a clew to the case that is baffling you. Go immediately to No. — Bowery, where you may be able to strike the right trail. Yours truly, "ANDREW GLEESON."

"Well?" asked Slick.

"I do not know the writing, and I am more puzzled than ever."

"The same with me. And now I will make some disclosures that will probably puzzle you a good deal more, Mr. Rice. The thing is boiling up thick, and there is danger that the pot will boil over, soon."

CHAPTER VIII.

SAM'S OTHER ALLY.

Dick Rice was a young man, older than the detective by some five or six years, but still a young man, for the detective had barely turned over out of youth.

He was good-looking, with a decidedly manly presence, and possessed of a figure that betokened the athlete.

He was well, but plainly dressed, and looked like an energetic young business man.

"What more have you got to show me?" he asked.

"Well, for one thing, this," and the detective handed him another note to read.

"Heavens!" was the immediate exclaim. It was the note Satin Sam had found in the card case.

"You see," he observed, "this man Gleeson knows her, too, Mr. Rice."

"It would seem so."

"It is so."

"And has influence over her."

"Enough to bring her to that place at his bidding."

Rice read the note aloud:

"Miss Kemper—Do not fail to be at No. — Bowery, at ten o'clock, if you are anxious."

"ANDREW GLEESON."

"What on earth do you make out of it?" asked Rice. "I am all at sea."

"Which brings us face to face with the problem: who is this man Gleeson?"

"Who is he, indeed?"

"A pity there is no address on the note."

"It has probably been on the envelope, but that is wanting."

"And we are in the dark."

"Now I will show you a ray of light if I dare call it that."

"God bless you if you can!" fervently.

"Well, here are these two notes, one to me and the other to the young lady, which we assume must be from the same person."

"Yes, and what then?"

"Let us look at it from my view first; I was summoned to a certain house on the Bowery."

"Yes."

"When I got there that house was in flames, and the firemen were playing upon it. I had been detained by the rescue of the young woman from under the horses' hoofs, as described."

"Exactly."

"It was then somewhat after ten o'clock. The young woman was late in keeping the appointment, if such it could be called. Suppose she had arrived at that house ten minutes or a quarter of an hour earlier, what then would have been the situation when I got there?"

"Great Heavens! What does it mean?"

"I am determined to know before I give it up. But, let us glance at what really was seen in that house, by one of the first to enter upon the arrival of the fire engines; and that was the boy who received the reward for saving a life. He found a man there, in an upper room, helplessly bound to a chair and left to perish in the flames."

"That seems incredible! Who was the man?"

"Who knows? By this writing, I think possibly that he and this mysterious Gleeson are one."

"Worse and worse, Mr. Kennedy. There is no hope of ever reaching the bottom of so complicated a mess."

"We are in this thing to win. Will you work with me, Mr. Rice?"

"Work with you? I will spend life and fortune—"

"Enough said. We have got to find this mysterious Gleeson the first thing. If we can do that, we may be able to get at the rest of it."

"Who can have tied the man and left him there in that manner?"

"More than one man, that is certain, for he was a powerful fellow, and no one man could have done it."

"Then have you seen him? When and where?"

"When he ran out of the house."

"Would you know him again?"

"I think I should, but I did not get a good look at him."

"And what is this threat he makes against the boy, at the same time that he rewards him?"

"Why, no sooner had the boy rescued him than he threatened the boy's life if he breathed a word of what he had seen."

"And what do you want me to do?"

"I want you to play the spy upon Mr. Randall."

"Sir?"

"Oh! Detectives must not be squeamish about honor, and all that; if you will not do it some one else must, and it is all to your interest to try it. I do not want to share any of this with the police."

"What is your suspicion? What in the name of Heaven must he be watched for? I am at a loss."

"I suspect him, that is all."

"Of what?"

"Of having fooled all the police in the neatest kind of way."

"Why, what on earth gives you that impression?"

"Because he tried to blind me, but could not do it, and he has given me a glimpse into his hand. I will tell you, privately, that I suspect that he has had a hand in this disappearance. But, breathe it not, for it may upset all our plans, if we can be said to have any. Watch him, and report to me."

"Well, to keep good my word that I was ready to do anything, I will do this, for the sake of the woman I love."

CHAPTER IX.

BOB GETS BIT.

After some further talk and consultation, Dick Rice left the detective's office.

He went up Broadway, hardly conscious of anything going on around him, so busy was his mind.

The strange things he had just heard had almost put his brain in a whirl, and he could not penetrate the mists of mystery surrounding him. But he was more than willing to play the part that had been given him; to remain idle, or indifferent, while the fate of his promised wife remained in uncertainty, was impossible.

"Willing to do it?" he said to himself.

"I would brave the dangers of the regions infernal, if that would bring her back again to my arms! Emeline, my lost one, shall I ever see thee again?"

With clinched hands, and with a dimness of sight, he pressed on through the crowd, a street, firmly resolved to do what he could.

As soon as his client was gone, Satin Sam prepared for the street again, and this time in a disguise.

He went out, and in due time was in the neighborhood of the residence of Philip Randall, which was also the home of the missing young woman, as has been stated.

Just as he was passing the house, on the other side of the street, a man came down the broad steps—a stranger to the detective.

Satin Sam gave him a quick survey, trying to decide whether he had ever seen him before or not, but he could not satisfy his mind on the point.

There was something about the person that struck him as familiar, and yet he would have been at a loss to describe what it was.

He looked around for Rice.

That had been the main design of his coming there, to see how well his aide was doing his part.

Further down the street he saw the lover, in something of a disguise, but one the detective had no trouble in penetrating, and feeling satisfied that Rice could and would do the work assigned him. Sam at once took to shadowing the man who had just left the house.

But what of Big Boots Bob meantime.

When grabbed by the collar, as described, Bob made an effort to resist; but it was altogether useless, as he immediately found; and, too, he quickly decided that the man of the fire had a grip on him again.

But that was about all he had time to think, for, the next he knew, the door of a house had closed upon him.

"What are you doing here, you whelp?" his captor demanded.

"I—I—I don't know, sir," Big Boots Bob whined. "You done it, sir."

"Yes, and I have a notion to do it again, and worse. What brought you to this place?"

"I was only walkin' around."

"Who are you, then?"

"Tommy Green, sir. Please let me go, sir; I ain't done nothin', sir; 'deed I ain't done nothin'."

"You are the boy they call Big Boots Bob, are you not?"

Bob had been trying to get a good look at the man's face all this time, and now that his eyes grew a little accustomed to the dusk of the hall, he could make out that his captor was a big man with a full beard, so it could not be the man whose life he had saved.

"No, sir; that ain't me; I wear shoes; no boots 'bout me."

"Well, you look enough like that little tough, anyhow, and if you are—"

"Don't hurt me, boss; please don't," Bob whined, as if he were on the point of crying.

"Don't you snivel," the man cried, "or I will wring your neck for you! I will see whether you are lying or not!"

He laid hold on Bob's collar again, carrying him along the hall to the rear and into a room, the door of which he closed and fastened, when he let go his hold.

Here it was much lighter.

Bob had a good look at his captor now, and it did not take the sharp-eyed Fire Laddie more than a second to penetrate the man's disguise, for it was the man of the fire, the one whose life he had saved!

"Well, I know you," the man said, positively.

"No; you make a mistake," Bob still maintained.

"I tell you, I know you. Perhaps you remember a warning that was given you."

"You are talkin' all Dutch to me, sir," persisted the boy, still determined to face it out. "I don't know what you are talking about."

"Well, have it that way, then. What have you got in your pockets?"

"Nothin', only what 'longs to me, sir."

"Sure of that?"

"Yep."

"Well, I will satisfy myself on that head. You look like the chap who picked my wife's pocket this morning, and I am going to make sure of it."

Bob looked at the door, as if he would make good his escape, but the man put himself in the way.

"Come here to me," he ordered.

"What are you goin' to do?" asked Bob.

"One thing I am not going to do," making a sudden reach and grabbing the boy; "I am not going to argue the matter with you."

Having hold of him, he held his hands, threw one leg over his body, and proceeded to search his pockets.

The first thing he drew forth was the money.

"Ha! you are the very chap!" he cried. "Maybe you are not Big Boots Bob, but you are the pickpocket, and here is the proof of it—the very money my wife lost!"

Bob was now in a fix, for a certainty.

He did not want to lose his money, and he assuredly did not want to get into trouble.

He was puzzled, to a degree. How had the man been able to "get onto" him so suddenly, when he could not have known that he was coming to that neighborhood?

Bob did not let on that he knew the man.

"No, I didn't steal it; hones' I didn't!" he whined.

"Then how did you come by it?"

"I earned it."

"Earned it? Ha, ha, ha! That is pretty good, now, hang me if it isn't! As if boys of your age could earn such big money as that!"

"But I did, sir."

"How could you?"

"Well, I did somethin' that it was give to me for, sir."

"Ah! and what was that?"

"I am forced not to tell that, sir; I couldn't tell that if I was killed for it."

"Ha, ha, ha! Well, now, that is a likely story, that is, a very likely story indeed. Honest boys have no such secrets as that, my laddie. I will attend to you."

With that the man stuffed the money into his pocket, and laying hold upon Bob by the collar as before, jerked him up and along, and took him down a back stairs into what had the appearance of being a dismal cellar.

"I'll put you in the cooler, I think," he said, "till I have time to hand you over to the police. A young pickpocket like you has no business at large!"

CHAPTER X.

BIG BOOTS BOTTLED.

Big Boots Bob knew there was no use in playing further.

He knew this man for the same one whom he had rescued from the burning house, and the man knew him.

The money in his pocket was proof, even if the man had not known him well enough by sight besides. Both together, there was not much of a chance for doubt—in fact, none.

"I cave, mister," Bob now cried out. "I give in."

"What do you mean?"

"I am Big Boots Bob."

"Of course you are; I have seen you before."

"And you are the man I saved."

"Eh?"

"I say you are the man I saved."

"The man you saved? Now you are talking through your hat, sure enough."

"Don't you mean to own it?"

"If you will tell me what you are talking about, maybe I will, if I have been saved by anybody, which is news to me."

"Don't you know? You were in the burnin' house, tied fast to a chair, and I was the one that cut the cords and let you out. And then you sent me that money by the darky."

"You would make a good novelist, boy, I think; you have got a vivid imagination. Why don't you study for it?"

"Then you mean to say you ain't the man?"

"Haven't the slightest idea what you are talking about. You are either lying or crazy."

"But, boss, I ain't told nobody."

"Told anybody what?"

"What you said not to tell."

"All bosh. You are crazy, but not so crazy that you don't know how to pick pockets. I will attend to you later, when I have time."

Bob now saw that his fate was settled for the present, so he said no more, but he thought.

The man pulled him across to a corner where there was something that had the appearance of a large hot air furnace, but which was in disuse.

In the front of this was a big door, and opening this, the man bade Bob get in.

Naturally, Bob declined.

"Well, we can soon settle that little matter," and the man picked him up, doubled him with the strength of a giant, and; the next moment, Bob was in the furnace, and the door had been shut with a clang!

"There you are, and now stay there for a little while," the man cried, savagely, as he turned away. "You would not exercise good sense when you had the chance."

"I'll have time to think it over now," called out Bob.

"Yes; and plenty of it."

The man went up the stairs, and Bob heard the door close at the top.

"Well, here I am, in a fine mess," the Fire Laddie said to himself. "And, what is the worst of all, my money gone and my trip to Harlem all blowed to smoke. This is what comes of makin' a fool of myself."

He kicked and struck at the sides of his close prison in his madness, but he seemed to be only too well secured.

"I was cut out for a fireman," he went on complaining, "and what I want to monkey with detective business for is more than I know. But, I won't do it again, you bet, if I once get out of this scrape! Satin Sam, you kin go it alone, after this, fer all o' me!"

The boy truly was in a fix, but he did not give up being beaten yet, and went feeling carefully about within the iron shell of the big furnace.

In the bottom was a bed of cinders, on which he stood. On top was a hole, into which he could thrust his head by standing erect. On all sides were fire brick and iron, and the door was fastened on the outside.

Meantime, Satin Sam followed the man whom he had seen leaving the Randall residence. The trail led down the street, and finally into a restaurant, which the "piped" man entered.

Sam had business in the same place. He went in a few minutes later, with a brisk step, and ordered something to eat.

He had taken a seat with his back to the man he was shadowing.

By the time his order was filled, another man customer entered, and, after looking around, this newcomer advanced and took a seat at the table with the suspect.

The newcomer ordered something, as the first had done, and Satin Sam was beginning to think that the two really were strangers, and that nothing was to be the outcome of the meeting.

Satin Sam had a trick which he had originated himself, and which, so far as he knew, had never been used by any other detective.

He drew from his pocket a pair of nose glasses, and put them on.

These glasses were of the usual style and pattern, and yet in one slight particular they were vastly different from the ordinary.

In each of the outer corners, or ends, was a small space, less than a quarter of an inch in extent, which was mirrored. That is to say, it was, in fact, a tiny looking glass.

Any wearer of glasses knows, that with certain conditions of light, he can, by looking at his glass instead of through it, observe what is going on behind him; and this the young detective had made use of, and had improved upon in the manner described.

By turning his head just a little, he saw all that was going on behind him, and immediately knew that these two men were confederates.

The newcomer being seated on the op-

posite side of the table, the shadower had a good view of his face, and made up his mind at once that the man was wearing a disguise.

And in that he was not mistaken.

The two men were nodding to each other, and it seemed to Sam as if they were conversing in some manner or other, but he could not detect how.

At first he could not, but presently he did.

When he looked first, it was not the newcomer who was expressing himself, but the other.

As soon as the newcomer took it up, then Satin Sam understood quickly enough how it was. The men were talking with their lips only, using their heads to give stress to words.

Sam could not detect what was said.

He tried, but what to the pair interested seemed easy, was to him impossible.

He thought he caught the formation of some words, as the man's lips moved, but the motion changed so rapidly that he could not follow it, as this was something new to him.

One thing he was assured of, which was, that this was not the first time these men had carried on a talk in that way. Nothing but practice could have made them so perfect at it.

Sam ate his luncheon, watching the men behind him in the corners of his glasses, first one side and then the other, but during the whole time they sat there he did not hear them speak a word.

Finally they got up, and went out.

Sam himself had been through for some minutes, but had been dallying in order to gain time.

He now rose, paid his bill as he passed out, and gained the sidewalk not over a minute after the two he had been shadowing, but, to his amazement, they were gone.

He looked in both directions, but where they had disappeared to was a mystery. Not a sign of them was to be seen, and, asking a boy who was loitering near, the lad declared that no two men had come out at all.

This statement gave the sharp shadower the cue to the situation. The boy had been there, that he admitted, and he certainly had seen the men. They, then, must have tipped him to lie, which being the case, they had discovered that a detective was after them, and had taken this means of dropping him.

CHAPTER XI.

SAM'S CUTE TRICK.

Satin Sam was in a quandary. It was all too straight that he had been detected, and that now he was in all probability shadowed in turn.

"I have got to redeem this lost ground somehow," he said to himself, as he walked away from the scene of his defeat. "They are smarter rascals than I was counting on."

They were, indeed.

He was in disguise, as said, but he still carried his lithe cane, and cut the air with it savagely as he walked.

His eyeglasses were still on his nose, and glancing into one of the mirrored corners, he took a look behind him, and saw something that put him on his guard.

At some distance behind him were two men, one of whom he had shadowed at the restaurant. The other was a new actor upon the stage.

The first mentioned was the man Satin Sam had followed from the house of Mr. Randall, and whom, even yet, Sam had had no good opportunity to study.

In the restaurant they had been seated back to back.

This man had hold of the other's arm at the instant when Sam looked, and was pointing in Sam's direction.

The second man nodded vigorously, the first emphasized something he had said, and then, with a cautious look at the young detective, he dodged back out of sight, and the other came on.

"Well, that is pretty good, anyhow," quoth Sam to himself. "You think you have scored one ahead now, but I was in it that deal, my fine gentlemen! I know a trick or two, and this is one of them, even if it does not amount to much. Now, we'll see which of us can play the better game."

The young detective proceeded on his way, swinging his cane as before, and while he was watched he was also a watcher.

The man who was following was quite skillful, that was evident.

He was a young man, mayhap twenty-four years old, and had the stamp of the tough about him. That he would prove a tough customer, if it came to a tussle, Sam had not a doubt.

"Now, what am I going to do with him?" Satin Sam asked himself.

Do? Why, throw him off the track, if possible.

Not that he had much hope of doing it, for, already he had had a sample of the caliber of the rascals, and felt that they were decidedly cute crooks, up to all manner of dodges and dodgers. He walked along, half carelessly it seemed, but all the time with close watch upon his "piper," and once he turned around just to see what the man would do in that event.

By the time he had turned, the man was standing and gazing up at the top of one of the buildings on the other side of the street.

"Well, I'll be hanged if he isn't a good one at it, anyhow," the young detective had to admit as he walked on. "And now he is after me again, happy in his belief that he has fooled me."

It was now Sam's turn to try a dodge.

He was just approaching a corner on which stood a saloon, and when he came to the doors of the place he entered.

The instant he had passed the door he removed his disguise, consisting of a wig and small side whiskers, and giving his lithe cane a quick manipulation, he folded it and put it in his pocket.

He had not stopped at all, but went right through the room and out by a side door.

When he came out on the street he could hardly have been taken for the same person, unless particular attention had been paid to his clothes.

He turned toward the corner, and as he rounded it, he came face to face with his shadower, who had just come up.

Sam was looking about as if uncertain of his way.

Seeing this man, he approached him as any one might naturally do to make a civil inquiry.

"Could you tell me, sir," he asked, with the suggestion of an accent, "where — street is?"

The question was needless, of course.

"This is it," was the prompt answer.

"Ah! Thank you, sir; I was not sure of it. Greatly obliged to you, sir. By the by, maybe you could tell me where to find the business house of Stout & Weatherbee, sir?"

He said this to gain time, while he took a good look at the man's face.

"Never heard of it, sir."

"It is a big hardware establishment, I believe."

"Don't know anything about it. Don't you know the number you want?"

"That is the deuce of it, sir; I have lost the address, and only know that it is on this street."

"Better ask a policeman, then."

"Ah, yes; that is what I will do, sir. Thank you, sir."

The man appeared in haste to enter the saloon, and Sam left him abruptly.

He thought it better to do so than to delay too long and run the risk of giving away the trick which he believed he had successfully worked.

He started down the street, and, as soon as the man had disappeared, ran, and was quickly out of sight around the corner, and that was the last he saw of his artful shadower for the time being.

Sam made good speed until he had turned several corners, then he slackened his walk and enjoyed a laugh.

"Well, that was about as neatly as I ever did that trick," he applauded himself. "I'll bet that fellow is doing some high swearing about now. Ha, ha, ha! Well, it was an even thing between us."

Sam proceeded immediately to Broadway, where he took a car, and in a brief time was at his office.

Here he made a complete alteration in his disguise, and came forth anything but "slick."

He had on seedy clothes, and looked like a fellow out of work and in almost the last stages of chronic hard luck, like many a poor, enforced idler the city could show.

In this outfit he made haste to the neighborhood to which he had sent his Fire Laddie ally, Big Boots Bob.

He wanted to ascertain what the boy had learned, if anything.

Arriving there, he saw nothing of Bob, of course, but could not understand it, and was forced to believe that something had happened to the little fellow.

While he stood in front of the Dutchman's store, who should appear but the man of the hour before—the street spotter whom he had so nicely tricked!

Sam was elated, for, seemingly, the tables were now turned with a vengeance, and he could play the shadow game upon him without a chance of discovery almost.

The young detective was standing as if he had nothing to do and plenty of time to do it in, and the fellow gave him only a passing glance as he came along, but Sam kept him under surveillance.

The man was not going far. He sprang up the steps of a house a moment after and pulled the bell, and when the door was opened to him he entered.

CHAPTER XII.

GAINS AND LOSSES.

"Ha! score one!" was Satin Sam's instant ejaculation.

"If this isn't a rich piece of luck, I never had luck, that's all."

He moved away from the house in a slouching manner, so that he might not be noticed or suspected as a spotter.

"That girl was cute, sure enough," he further mused. "She had to give an address, but she gave the wrong number in doing it. That was to fool me. She got home promptly just the same."

He ran the events over in mind, and the more he thought of it all the less he liked the appearances against the missing Miss Kemper.

That, by the way, was a novel case: the disappearance of Emeline Kemper, heiress to a vast estate, with no justifying reason for such an act, and not the shadow of a clew to be had as to her whereabouts, while her guardian and relations and friends all had exerted themselves to the utmost to discover her.

The girl had left the house early one evening, intending to call upon a friend only a few doors away, and had never been heard of since.

That was the situation up to this time.

But, here was this young detective, the youngest on the case, employed privately by the young woman's accepted lover, with a clew at last!

And that clew was—what?

Well, he hardly had it straight in his own mind, but it was a clew.

Here was a house where the mystery seemed to center; but as he thought of it, Sam almost asked himself how he had found it out.

But where was Big Boots Bob?

Possibly he had already spotted this house, and perhaps was shadowing some person who had come forth from it?

Sam decided that such must be the case, and could not have even surmised the terrible fix his youthful ally was in at that moment.

Satin Sam took his seat on a box that stood outside the Dutchman's store, and began to chip a stick with his knife while he watched.

He had not been there a great while when two men came along.

Sam observed them without raising his head, and to his immense satisfaction discovered that they were the two men of the restaurant episode!

"Then you won't come in?" one was asking, as they came along.

"No, I must get back," was the response.

"Well, I will carry out the new scheme, if it can be made to work, and will let you hear from me soon."

"Yes, do so—Hello, what's this?"

The door of the house into which Sam's shadower had disappeared suddenly opened, and that gentleman came hurriedly out.

"Why, it's Purker."

"So it is."

"What can have happened, that he is here so soon?"

"Don't know; unless he has already run that young fellow into a trap for us. That may be it."

The man hastened to join the others.

"The deuce is to pay," he growled, the moment he came up.

"What is it?"

"He slipped me."

They spoke in tones so low that Sam barely heard their words.

"Escaped?"

"In the neatest kind of way. Never was tricked like it before in my life, and that is a fact. He is the cutest cuss in shoe-leather!"

"How did he do it?"

"I don't know. He entered a saloon, and that was the last I saw of him. I say I don't know, but the fact of the matter is I do know. I didn't at the first."

"How was it?"

"It was done so quick, that was what throwed me out."

"No matter about that. How was it done?"

"Well, I asked for him in the place, and they told me a young fellow had made a rush through, from one door to the other, tearing himself to pieces as he went, as they put it, and then I saw through the sharp practice."

"And you couldn't get onto him again?"

"The deuce of it was, he had already got onto me, though the spooks only knows how he did it. When I got to the saloon he met me at the entrance, without his disguise, and had the nerve to stop me and ask questions. But, I will settle the score with him, curse him!"

Satin Sam had to smile, as he clearly heard all that was said.

"Are you sure you were not followed here?" asked one of the pair.

"Yes, I am sure of that."

"But that fellow has the name of being one of the hottest hounds in all New York."

"I don't care if he has; he has not followed me here. He made good his escape from me, and that was all that he cared for, I guess. I have doubled so that nobody could have followed me."

"Well, I hope you are not mistaken. I will leave you now, and you can talk it over."

"What am I to do next?" the crook detective asked.

"Lyman will tell you," was the answer. Sam clinched fast to that name the instant he heard it.

Was it an additional clue? He believed it was, and meant to make use of it.

"Well, all right; I am ready for anything, and I think I can safely promise you that there will not be another failure. But this is hardly the place to talk," and he cast a look at Sam as he spoke.

The young detective paid not the slightest attention, but chipped on with his knife as if oblivious to everything.

"Oh, we have not spoken above a whisper, scarcely," he heard the leader of the trio observe. "Still, we can't take too great care. No more now, but be ready for whatever may be wanted."

He waved his hand and started off.

"All right," the others called after him. "Take care of yourself."

"Try to do that. See you later."

This aloud, just as any friends might part, and the other two turned and went into the house.

"Now, my turn again!" decided the cutest detective on that puzzling case.

He got up lazily, shook off the whittlings he had made, and sauntered down the street in the direction the other man had taken.

This was the fellow who had come out of Randall's mansion some time before.

He stepped out at a lively pace, and for some time did not look around, but at length Sam saw him in the act of doing so.

Quicker than thought the young shadower was talking to a man.

He had just come face to face with the man, and had stopped on the instant and put a question to him.

The question required an answer, naturally, and, by the time that had been given the shadowed man had satisfied himself with his survey behind and was plodding on his way.

"Guess I fooled him that time, and nicely, too," Sam complimented himself.

But, as it happened, he was the one who was fooled.

The man he was following was one of the most wily rascals in New York, and not easy to deceive.

On turning, he had recognized Sam as the young man he had left seated before the Dutchman's store, and concluded at once that he was being followed by him.

He did not turn to look again, but went straight on, though he changed his point of destination.

CHAPTER XIII.

INTO A TRAP.

Satin Sam was on the alert, but there was no occasion for it.

He did not remove his eyes from his game, and was ready to attempt to play a trick if he turned.

But the man did not turn, as said, and the young detective concluded that he had no suspicion that any one was following him. He went straight ahead until he reached his destination.

Sam found that he was heading for a neighborhood in no wise noted for its good name, and when he stopped, it was to enter a low-looking dive.

Sam hesitated about following him in, for he knew that it might mean his death if spotted and discovered.

After giving it due thought, however, he decided to take the risk. He had not been suspected for a spy, he believed, and it was not likely that the man would pay any attention to him.

So he descended the steps and went in.

It was a place that needs no description, since its like is a familiar sight in the darker quarters of the vast city.

The man he had followed was standing at the bar, engaged in talk with the person in attendance, and he paid no attention as the door opened. Others were sitting around, but they merely looked up.

Satin Sam stepped to the bar.

"Do you know a chap named Mike Feegan?" he asked.

"Never heard of him," was the response.

"A pal of his told me he thought he might be here, that's why I asked."

"Don't know him."

"Well, mebbly not, by that name, fer Mike has got a lot o' names; he has one fer every day in the week, and an extra one fer Sundays."

"Who is that you are askin' fer?" spoke up a man at a table near by.

Sam looked around at him, to behold a hard-looking chap, about as rough a customer as the detective had ever had the misfortune to run up against.

"I was askin' fer Mike Feegan," Sam explained.

"Mike Feegan? I know him."

Here was more than Sam had figured on, for he had not imagined that he would strike a name that anybody knew, when he invented that one for that occasion.

Now that he was in for it, though, there was no drawing back, so he left the bar and stepped to the table.

"Where is he?" he asked.

"Well, that I can't say, this minnit," was the answer.

"But you can give me an idea, maybe, so that I can find him. I am a pal of his."

"I don't know whether I kin or not."

"Why?"

"Cause he is a pal of mine, too, and I will go slow about shootin' off my mouth to somebody I don't know."

"That's right," assented Sam. "You are the kind of a pal to have."

"Who are you?"

"Well, now, seein' that I can't be sure that the Mike Feegan I am lookin' fer is the Mike Feegan that you know, I think I will go slow about givin' myself away."

"Seems you are cautious, too."

"It pays to be."

"Well, you are right. But come with me into the back room here a minute, and we'll soon see whether it's the same Mike or not."

"How will you tell?"

"His pictur' is there."

"Oh, all right."

There was no way for Sam to back out, so he had to go along in order not to give himself away.

He started to follow the hard-looking customer, but had not taken four steps in the direction of the room when something happened.

He was suddenly seized, so unexpectedly that he was completely off his guard.

He struggled, but it was useless, for two men had hold of him, one on either side, and they hurried him along.

"Yes, we'll see about Mike Feegan," said one of them, with a light laugh.

Satin Sam looked at him, to discover that it was the man he had followed.

Of course he immediately "tumbled" to the fact that he had been duped, and that for the second time he had been taken in by these "professionals."

In a moment they had him in a small rear room, and the door closed.

The man who had engaged Sam in talk had gone ahead, and he now laid hold upon the young detective, relieving the other.

"Now, I want a straight account of you," said the fellow.

He was the man Sam had originally set out to follow, it will be held in mind. He seemed to be the head of the clique or gang of crook experts, or, at any rate, one who had something of authority over the others.

"That won't be hard to get," Sam coolly answered.

"All the better for you. Your name?"

"Ted Smith."

"You lie."

"Can you prove it?"

"It will be to your interest to talk straight."

"That is the way I mean to talk. No object to me to talk any other way."

"You followed me here."

"Did I?"

"Yes, and I want to know what you did it for."

"Well, you seem to have a big suspicion of me. Do you take me for a police department?"

"I want you to stop foolishness and talk business."

"I am talking business now."

"Why did you follow me?"

"Didn't!"

"I know better. You were sitting on a box in front of a store on — street while I was talking with some friends there, and you dogged my heels all the way here. I want to know why."

"I refuse to believe that statement, sir, 'less you can prove it. It is true that I came here from — street, but I am lookin' fer my friend Feegan, and I don't know anything 'bout you and don't want to. See?"

"No, I don't see yet, but I am going to see. Men, hold him fast and I will search him."

Sam saw it was all up now, for what was on his person would give him dead away.

"Ha!" the man exclaimed the next moment, "in disguise, eh?" And he snatched away the deceiving wig.

The face revealed was that of Satin Sam, the Dandy Detective.

"So, you are looking for your friend Feegan, are you?" cried the leader of the men, with a laugh.

"Guess I have found him," assumed Sam.

"Yes, I guess you have, too. Do you know what we are going to do with you?"

"That would be hard for me to tell."

"You are the detective known as Satin Sam."

"You say so."

"We know it now. We are going to lay you up for a spell, so that you will not have to trouble yourself with things that do not concern you."

"Thoughtful of you."

"Yes, we have been thoughtful over it for some time. It would have worked this morning if you had arrived on time. Don't mind telling you this now, since you have no chance of getting away."

Here was something that opened Sam's eyes.

Would he have lost his life if he had appeared earlier at the scene of the fire?

What was more, was this man the mysterious Andrew Gleeson who had sent him the note? And, if so, why had he re-

quired Emeline Kemper to be present? There was a mystery upon a mystery, Sam thought.

CHAPTER XIV. PLAYING A POINT.

Sam was satisfied of one thing—the man was in disguise.

There was something familiar about him, but Sam had even yet been unable to determine where he had seen the person before, and under what circumstances.

Immediately he made up his mind to unmask the suspect, if chance offered, and of course watched for the opportunity.

"Well, what's goin' to be done with him?" asked the more villainous looking man of the two.

"We will put him away and take care of him, that is all."

"Not for keeps?"

"Till we are done with him. See that he does not get away, and that he does not have a chance to communicate with any one."

"All right, boss."

"Before you get away from us, young man, you will be as tame as an old cart horse, and will be willing enough to accept whatever conditions are offered you. This is no idle boast, as you will discover."

"I can well believe you," returned Sam, without further attempt to deceive. "There is one thing I would like to say to you."

"What is it?"

"I want to speak it in private."

"You may speak right out before these men."

"No, it won't do, for it is something that maybe you would not want even them to hear."

"Then you will have to keep it to yourself."

"That will not do, either."

"Confound it, what are you hinting at?"

"I am not hinting at anything. If you do not want to give me the chance I ask for, don't, that is all."

"See here; do you mean to say that you would sell out and come in on our side in order to save your own neck?"

"No; I don't say that. I won't play the sneak with you, whoever you are. You know me for what I am, now."

"I know that you are the young detective called Satin Sam."

"Very well. You will find that Satin Sam knows not the word fear, and that he is no sneak, even if a detective. I will not deceive you. It is war to the finish between me and your gang."

"Good enough. Then you can have nothing to say to me that is not for your own gain."

"I acknowledge that."

"And hence you have nothing to say to me at all."

The other men had been listening attentively to this, and their hold upon Sam's arm had slightly relaxed.

Sam smiled.

"Well, I admit that it was a trick," he acknowledged.

"And you have had to admit as well that it did not work. You have met more than your match this—"

"Have I?"

With a sudden effort, so quick that none could have suspected it, Sam tore out of the grasp of his captors, and leaped upon the man.

He made a grab at his head, as he did so, and tore off wig and whiskers with one motion.

Stood revealed before him Philip Randall.

Satin Sam sought to take further advantage of his freedom, but was too late, for barely had he done this much when he was again seized.

The man Randall was now white to the lips, and his eyes burned like fire.

"You have sealed your fate by that act!" he said, in a cold tone. "Men, he is here for keeps."

His men, too, were staring hard at the man, as if this were the first they had ever seen of the real face beneath the mask. Indeed, perhaps they had not even suspected his wearing a disguise.

It had been one so clever as almost to fool Satin Sam.

"All right," said the hard-looking customer. "We know what to do with him, if you say that."

"And that is what I have said. Do well the work, and I will see to it that you get all it is worth. I will meet with you here again, in the same person as you have known me."

"The only way we do know you," muttered the other.

"And the only way you ever can know me, save at your peril," was the grim rejoinder.

The man had recovered his disguise, and was putting it on again, by the aid of a small pocket glass, and he took it as calmly as if nothing serious had happened.

"Satin Sam," he said, as soon as he had done, "you would have made the prince of detectives in time if you had not meddled with this case, but you have bucked against a man who knows a thing or two in that line himself."

"I fancy that I have met the prince of rascals in you," Sam answered.

"We will let it drop. We will not meet again."

He viewed himself once more in the glass, and said to his men:

"Mind you, certain work this time! A good deal depends on you, and it will mean a big slice for each of you."

"You kin trust us, boss!"

With that the master spirit of the crook cohort left the room.

Satin Sam immediately decided upon a new plan of action, and set about putting it in motion.

"How much do you expect to get out of him?" he asked, coolly.

"More of the good than you ever handled," was the response. "Come! We ain't got no time to talk with you."

"No harm to talk a little, is there, while I am alive? You are soon going to put me where there will be no need of talking, I fancy?"

"You are right; we are going to do just that thing!"

"And right off, too," growled the other. "No time to waste, pal."

They opened a door at once, at the side of the room, disclosing a passage, and they passed out into this, pulling their prisoner after them.

As soon as they had closed the door Sam ventured to speak again.

"Do you think you will get a cool hundred?" he asked.

"A hundred! Boy, it will be five hundred apiece, at the very least. Do you think we would let a rat like you stand in the way of that?"

"Not likely that you would, I should opine!"

"Well, you can bet on that every time, Samuel."

"But, what if I could make it five thousand apiece for you?"

"Ha, ha! You are only talkin' big, now!"

"Not a bit of it. I mean precisely that and nothing else."

"You never seen ten thousand dollars, is my guess."

"I admit that, but I know of some one that has, and ten mes ten, for that matter!"

"Who is the big bug? Tell us that!"

"Well, some one who would pay you for my life a clean five thousand dollars apiece, and no questions asked."

They stopped short, and one of the men struck a match, for they had been proceeding in the dark.

They had come to a place where there was a gas jet, and the man lighted the gas. That done, they took a good survey of their prisoner.

"See here, is this all brag?" one of the evil pair demanded.

"Not a word but the truth," was the assurance. "Give me half a chance to work it, and you'll be the richer by the big sum I have named. This is business—nothing else; none of your paltry pay for that man Randall's dirty work."

Both men were evidently "struck hard" by the proposition.

"It is just like this," the prisoner hastened to clinch: "This man you are working for is working against a party worth a million, more or less, and all you will get out of it is the little he has a mind to give you—certainly not more than the five hundred."

"We kin make him come up high, sonny."

"Can you? You kill me and he will have a rope around your necks, even if he has not already, and as he is a conscienceless scoundrel, you may bet high he'll make you fellows dance if you try to crowd him."

This rather startled them, and they showed it by their looks.

"Durn me if there ain't somethin' in that!" one exclaimed. "I guess we had better sail a little slow till we see where we are at, don't you think so, pard?"

"I think we had, fer a fact," agreed the other. "That is something I hadn't thought of, and if there is more money fer us on the other side, that is the side we want to be on. It is worth stoppin' to think about, anyhow."

Sam's little game had worked.

CHAPTER XV.

SATIN IN LIMBO.

"What were you going to do with me?" the young detective asked, to get on the true situation.

"We was goin' to kill ye, and that right off snug, you bet!" was the reply. "That was what the order meant—to hold you here for keeps."

"And how were you going to do it?"

"That don't have to be told."

"Of course not; was merely curious to know what I had escaped."

"Well, don't be too curious about it, that is all. Come on with him, pal, and we will take care of him."

It was useless for Sam to resist, so he went on without a demur, and at the end of the passage they descended by some stone steps to a chamber which was as dark and chilly as a veritable tomb.

Here another gas jet was lighted, and the flame revealed a square room, not very large, with floor and sides of cement. From every side, or rather from three sides, the floor sloped away toward one corner, where there was a low, long door that was hinged at the top, but which had no knob or lift anywhere in sight.

All this Satin Sam took in at a glance.

Further, he saw that the side walls showed the mark where water had been, and then understood that he was in what could be used for a cistern or reservoir.

At thought of the fate that he might meet in such a gruesome place, he felt a cold chill play along his spine, but he showed nothing of this in his voice when he spoke:

"Quite a neat bath," he observed, jocosely.

The two men looked at him quickly, as if surprised at his surmise.

"You are sharp," said one.

"Do not need to be, to read the signs here."

"Well, we are going to leave you here, and the mischief help you if the water gits turned on."

"Yes, I should think so."

"That was what we intended doin' to you."

"I see it was. But don't put yourselves to that trouble. Keep me out of the wet if you want to never run dry."

"Darn it, but you are a cool customer."

"Yes, I try to be, particularly when there is big innings at the end."

"Well, we are goin' to leave you here, and one of us will come to see you later. If we think we kin work it as you have hinted, we will do it, you can count on that!"

"I think I will be safe in saying something more."

"What is that?"

"Whatever price you think that fellow would pay, the other party will double it every time; so don't you worry over any humbug or real offer the archvillain Randall may make you or your gang, boss."

"Then if that is the case, we are yours, sure enough. We are in it fer money, and nothin' else, and would be fools to wipe up the streets with to take five hundred when we can get five thousand!"

"All right; that is the business way to look at it."

"We think the same; and meantime he won't know but what you have taken the bath, according to orders."

"Very well, take your time and think it over, and then come back and let me hear your decision. And, boys, here's another thing to consider," the wily Sam intimated.

"What's that?"

"You are pretty sharp fellows, I have seen enough of you to know that, and you could do good work on the other side in the case."

"Yes, mebbly we could, if it paid."

"Well, if you care to try it, I will see that you are not troubled for any other little games you may have to answer for to the police, if they get hold of you, and be sure it will pay, too, in the right way."

"That is fair enough, certain. We will give that some think, pal, and mebbly we kin come to a 'greement of some kind that'll make all things hunk."

"I don't doubt it."

The two men proceeded then to tie the young detective's hands and feet, and when they had done that they left him lying there on the hard floor, and started to leave the place.

"When can I expect you back?" Sam asked.

"That we can't tell, but 'fore we go we will turn a pipe so that the water can't reach ye, even if it is turned on."

"That will be a wise thing to do, of course."

"We begin to think that you are worth more to us alive than you would be dead, that is the reason."

"And it is reason enough, I should say, seeing how much there is in it for you both."

The men went up the steps, and Sam heard them close and lock the door at the top; then he was there alone.

But he was not in the dark; they had

not turned off the gas; perhaps had forgotten it.

Sam looked around his prison, and when he thought again of the water he felt another chill.

"Horrible!" he said to himself. "And they certainly meant to give it to me, too. But I guess I have won them over, and maybe they will so play into my hands, after all, that it will be a luck-strike in my getting into this terrible hole!"

He tried to think what he could do toward getting out of his novel jail, and thus get a march on the whole bad lot.

But escape seemed impossible, bound hands and feet, and thus utterly helpless.

"Yes, they have got me," he decided, "and just when the fire was getting up to the right heat. By Heavens! I must get out of here, somehow! I wonder where Big Boots Bob is, and if he has got into any such fix as I am in?"

So Sam feared, for he understood now the desperate character of the clique against whom he was fighting.

"The worst of my life," he said. "Never ran up against that man's equal before. And, what does it all mean? What kind of a double game is he playing? There is no escape for me now, knowing what he does—that I know him, unless these men play a strong hand for me."

Suddenly a thought came to him, as if it had been sent by some power greater than his own mind to invent, and almost without his own will, he began worming his way along the floor on his back, in the direction of where the gas was burning, and quickly he had reached the wall.

Putting his feet to the wall, he worked up closer and nearer, raising his legs up against the wall as he did so—no easy task, without the aid of hands to help him.

His plan could be guessed; it was to reach the flame of the gas jet, and so burn the cords that were holding his feet!

Inch by inch he worked his body up and up.

Then, having almost reached the desired height, he toppled over, and so fell flat upon the hard cement floor.

But, not discouraged, after resting for a few minutes, he made another effort, but slipped as before, at about the same stage in his progress, and it looked as if he could not accomplish his purpose.

Still he persisted; he must attain his purpose!

He rested between each effort, but he slipped again and again, until he was almost tired out and was growing disheartened.

Yet, he would not give up. He had some of the nature of Robert Bruce's spider about him, and determined at least not to give up trying, even if he never succeeded in his aim.

At last he had reached a point nearer than before, and paused to gather all his strength for a final effort.

He calculated well, and then put forth all his power.

But, again he slipped.

This time, however, something happened, something that he had not looked for and had not thought of, for as he slipped, one of his feet caught on the gas pipe, the staple that held it to the wall came out, and the pipe was bent to the floor, or nearly so. The flame flared, but it did not go out, and now the rest was easy!

Within five minutes Satin Sam had his hands and feet free!

CHAPTER XVI.

PARTNERS IN TRIBULATION.

Big Boots Bob was still within the confines of the furnace; so at this stage of the game the cohort of villains certainly

had the advantage, and it looked bad for both the young detective and his Fire-Laddie ally.

Bob had made every effort to get out, but without avail.

The hole above him was too small to admit of his crawling through, and as the furnace door was fastened on the outside, he certainly could not do anything with that.

He had given up trying; his situation, indeed, seemed so hopeless that he had settled down to make himself as comfortable as he could, and was waiting, since that was all he could do.

Time passed, and it seemed that he had been there a whole year. He had almost fallen asleep, so tired and indifferent had he become, when a noise was heard, and he aroused at once.

Was some one coming? Sure enough! The door opened, and steps sounded on the stairs.

Bob almost held his breath.

"This will do for him, for the present," said a voice.

"Yes, cuss him!" another exclaimed. "We'll soon have them all out of the way!"

They came on down, and the Fire-Laddie knew by the sound of their feet on the steps that they were carrying somebody, and he wondered who it could be.

He thought immediately of Satin Sam! Could it be that they had downed him? If so, the luck was certainly against them.

The men reached the bottom of the stairs and laid their burden on the floor.

"There, curse you!" cried one, vengefully.

The prisoner made no response, and Bob rightly guessed that he must be bound and gagged, and that being so, they were in no position to help each other.

Bob did not recognize either of the voices.

"Is he fixed all right?" asked the other man.

"Yes, he can't wiggle a finger."

"It would serve him right to end him now, for all time."

"But, this is not the place to do it. We will attend to that later."

"Then you mean to do it?"

"Sure. Do you think we will let a life or two stand in the way, now that the big game has progressed thus far?"

"No; we can't afford to stop now."

"Of course not. Those who have got an inkling of our game must be silenced, and this fellow is one. But, as I said, not here."

"Ready to go?"

"Yes; but to make doubly sure of this fellow, I'll bind him still tighter before we leave him."

Bob heard them busy for some moments.

"There! I would like to see you get out of that!" one of the men then exclaimed.

"The wonder will be if it don't kill him as it is," said the other.

"Well, let it, then; it will save us another job."

Bob heard a sound as if the prisoner had been kicked, and then the men ascended the stairs, passed out, and locked the door.

Bob had not made a sound, and of course was somewhat mystified.

How was it that the men had paid no attention to him? Did they consider him safe enough in his pent up iron cage?

Perhaps it was that, but the thought came to the young Arab that, maybe, they did not know he was there. Perhaps neither of these was one of those who had put him there.

He certainly had not recognized their voices, as said.

Waiting for some moments, he called out:

"Hello, other feller?"

No response.

Big Boots Bob, the Fire-Laddie.

"Hello, out there?" he called again. Still no answer.

"If you can't talk, give a grunt!" Bob cried, still louder.

He listened attentively, and heard something that might have been taken for an attempt to speak.

"Gagged, are you?" shouted the boy, and yet cautious not to call out too loudly. "Well, I am a prisoner, too, and we have got to help each other, somehow. I am in the furnace."

He heard other grunts.

"But, I can't get out, unless you kin feel your way over here and open the door for me," Bob went on to explain. "If you can do that, by hokus, I will bargain to do the rest!"

He was answered as before.

"If you heard what I said, and understand, give two whoppers," Bob directed. Immediately were heard two moans, louder than before.

"Bully fer you!" exclaimed the Fire Laddie. "Now I will hold my hush while you see what you can do, and if you open this door I will soon have you all hunk."

He was then quiet, listening.

Some sounds were heard without, but not loud, and presently something came against the furnace.

"Ha! Now you are comin' it!" cried Bob. "All you have got to do now is to pull the string till the bobbins flies up, as they say in the story of Ridin' Hood, and we'll be all hunk."

The other prisoner, whoever he was, could be heard fumbling around the big furnace door, but he was a long time in finding it, apparently.

Bob directed him as best he could by pounding within.

At last the door was touched.

"And now the latch!" Bob exclaimed. "Soon as you git onto the business part of that we will be all hunk."

He directed, well as he could, but it was a weary while before the man on the outside could even touch the latch and catch that held the iron door so tightly closed.

Finally, however, he did touch it, and with good effect.

It was lifted, and the door swung open under pressure from within, for Bob had been pushing gently all the time.

"Great hokus, but we'll be happy yet, you bet!" the boy asseverated, joyously.

It took him but a moment to get out.

All was darkness, and he could not see who the other prisoner was, but he found him immediately, by feeling.

Taking a knife from his pocket, Bob soon had his hands freed, and while the man was removing the gag from his mouth the boy carried his good work further and cut the cords that held his feet.

"Thank God!" were the prisoner's first words.

"And Big Boots Bob, too!" supplemented the boy.

"Yes, I thank you, too, my friend, whoever you are."

"No, you don't git on; I meant to say that I thanked God, same as you."

"Oh! I see."

"Who are you? If you see, it is more'n I kin do."

"I am Dick Rice—if you ever heard the name."

"Never did. Have heard of rice pud-din', on rare 'casions, but never heard of Dick Rice."

"You appear light-hearted, anyhow."

"May jes' as well be."

"What is your name?"

"Big Boots Bob."

"But you have another name?"

"Don't often wear it."

"What is it, anyhow?"

"Bob Handle, that is my sure enough name."

"Don't know you."

"And I don't know you. Thought mebby you might be Satin Sam."

"Ha! Do you know him?"

"I should snort! Knowin' him was what got me into this fix."

"Then you are the little ally he spoke about. The hand of Providence is in this, my lad."

"Don't know anything about the lie part of it, if there is any lie, and as fer Providence, he is a stranger to me; but you can bet that the hand of Big Boots Bob is goin' to be in it, now!"

"With mine to aid you. But, let me find a match, so that we can take a look at each other. Here is one! Ha! You look like a smart chap, and I think you and I together ought to be able to make our escape from this place, and particularly as we are thought to be doubly secure here."

CHAPTER XVII.

BIG BOOTS USES HIS EARS.

The match soon burned out, and they were in darkness as before.

But they had seen each other's face, and each was well impressed with the other's appearance.

"How did you come here?" asked Bob, next.

"That would be hard to tell, my young friend. I fell into a trap."

"And so did I. But, do you know Satin Sam? Take it that you do, from what you said."

"Yes, and he is working for me on an important case."

"Then that is the case I am on. You mean the one about that missin' young lady?"

"The same."

"That is the one. Tell me all about it. Where is Satin Sam now?"

"Would that I knew! Would that he were here, for then we should be able to do something, for right here is a true starting point."

"You can bet your life that Satin Sam has got long past the starting point, if he is on deck at all," declared Bob. "But, what was you doin', that you got into their hands?"

Thereupon Rice briefly told what had happened, stating how he had been set by Satin Sam to watch the Randall residence, for the purpose of finding out something about Randall—how he had spent the whole afternoon, steadily and patiently, without seeing a sign of the man, and had continued his vigil into the night—for it was now night in the world without.

Bob knew he had been there a long while, but he could hardly believe that so much time had passed; he thought he must have slept without knowing it.

"I saw no one," Rice continued. "A man did come out of the house, a very short time after I had taken up my station there, but it was not Randall, and so I did not pay any attention to him, and he was the only man who left the house the whole time I was on guard."

"Must 'a' slipped you," commented Bob.

"I believe it, now."

He went on to state how, in the evening, the same man came back who had gone out so long before, and had glanced at him in passing. He entered the house, and in a few minutes came out again. This time the watcher made up his mind to follow him. As a result, he was set upon and made a prisoner, and here he was. And he censured himself severely.

"Don't howl about what's done and

can't be helped," advised Bob. "We have got to git out of here, now, and the sooner the better. Let's look around."

And they did.

With the aid of matches, which they used cautiously, they took a survey of their prison, to discover that it was a cellar proper, under the house, but it was evident that it had not been put to much use for some time. There was a coal pit or bin that extended out under the sidewalk.

In the sidewalk was a coal hole, but they were unable to lift the heavy cover.

The door at the top of the steps was locked, as we have seen, and they were very cautious how they tried it.

They did not want to make a sound that would risk their being discovered, for, with the odds against them, the result would be that they would be placed beyond possibility of escape.

There was one other avenue, but they hardly dared risk that.

Down into the cellar, from the floors above, ran a shaft that had evidently, at some time or other, been used for the passage of a dumb-waiter.

It was a narrow opening or well, and there was nothing to support any one who might attempt to climb up it; still, it was possible that it could be done, and the more the two prisoners thought about it the more they felt like trying it.

While they were considering it they heard voices.

"Hark!" cautioned Bob.

He was standing within the shaft at the time.

They were silent, and could make out that the voices came from the room just over the basement, for this cellar was still lower than the basement.

"Voices!" said Rice.

"Yes, and I am goin' to know what they are sayin'," the boy declared.

"How can you do that?"

"Why, climb up and listen, of course!"

"But that will delay our getting out, perhaps," urged Rice.

"And it may be the means of our gettin' at the whole secret," suggested the sharp-witted lad.

"You are right. Try it!"

And try it Bob did.

With the man's help, he got a start up the shaft, and climbed on up easily enough, once the start had been given.

He made little or no noise in his movement, and presently was still, and the man below understood by this that he had reached the desired point.

The voices had become more distinct as Bob climbed up.

Finally he could hear what was said, and he stopped, bracing himself in the shaft, to listen.

"What time?" one man asked.

"Midnight."

"And she will be there?"

"Yes; that is arranged."

"And it will work you think?"

"There is nothing to hinder it, Lyman. It must work."

"Well, it ought to, now that we have cleared the field of these accursed detectives."

"There can be scarcely a doubt of it, now. Emeline Kemper will be found, and everything will be serene."

"But she will be found dead—that is the programme."

"Of course."

"And then there will be a great stir in the camp."

"We care nothing for that; we will know nothing—at any rate I will know nothing; you are not in it, so to say."

"And you think it will all blow over?"

"In a short time. All big sensations

do. As soon as the newspapers drop a matter as stale, that settles it."

"Well, I hope nothing will miscarry, like it did this morning."

"That is not likely to happen again."

"Probably not. Now, let me have the address."

"Yes; make careful note of that. It is No. — street."

"And the hour—"

"Midnight."

"I will not miss it. Has everything else been arranged?"

"Yes, everything."

"And that detective?"

"Is dead and in the river by this time."

At that point Big Boots Bob heard the street bell ring sharply.

"Who is that?" cried one of the men.

"Keep cool, and I will soon see," responded the other, and he left the room.

Voices were heard, and other men came into the room when he returned.

"Well," the ringleader asked, "is it all arranged?"

"Yes, everything."

"And the fire will be made at the right moment?"

"If the woman is alive at that minute it will be, and you can count on it."

"Then there is nothing else to do but to see that the proper persons are on hand at the proper time."

"And that no one else is."

"By Heavens, you are right! That accident of this morning must not happen again."

"But, one of them has been taken care of another way."

"You mean the detective?"

"Sure."

"Then you finished him?"

"Yes; he is now food for fishes. That is good-by to Satin Sam."

Big Boots Bob felt faint on hearing this, but he recovered his grip and held hard in his place of listening.

He heard much more, too much to be here repeated, dropping in fragments as it did, in the rapidly running conversation: and among other things he heard mention of the street and number of the trap into which Satin Sam had been enticed. In fact, he had full knowledge of how it had been done.

He had heard enough, both to alarm and to arouse him to hot action.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SURPRISES AND DENOUEMENT.

Big Boots Bob was on the point of slipping down again to join his companion in tribulation, when a ray of light just a little further up the shaft claimed his attention.

He judged, and rightly, that it came from the room in which these men were congregated.

With due caution he crept up to where the light filtered through.

Eureka! He could see them.

He took one long, careful survey, fixed the faces well in mind, and then slipped silently down the shaft to the bottom.

"Great hokus!" he cried, in whisper. "I have got the whole thing in a lump, and now we must get out of here quicker'n scat!"

"Yes, but how are we to do it? And what do you know?"

As briefly as possible, Bob told what he had overheard, and he added in conclusion:

"What is more, I have an idee that they have not downed Satin Sam half as much as they think they have, and we must go to that place post haste and find out what we can."

"But, there is scant time?"

"Lots of time, if we don't have to fool too much of it away here."

"Well, I will be guided by what you say, my lad, for if you have worked with that young detective before, you know better than I what to do now."

"Great hokus! I don't know nothing. But, what little I do know, I am goin' to polish up till it will shine like a good character, and don't you forget it. Hello! I believe them fellers is goin' out!"

"Yes, they are."

"Then this is our way of 'scape, sure pop!"

"How?"

"Up the flume."

"But, some one of the gang may remain behind."

"We are good for one of 'em, you bet! You jest wait here a minnit, and if I chirp like a cricket, you shin up after me, understand?"

"All right, I will be guided by you, my brave boy."

So Bob crept again up through the shaft, until he came to the place where he could look through into the room. At first, no one was to be seen, and he discovered that the place where the light came through was where a door for the use of the waiter that had formerly run in the shaft had its place in the wall, and he found that this door was not tightly secured.

He chirped for his comrade to follow him.

Rice began the ascent, but it was some minutes before he reached the point where Bob was waiting.

When he did so he was somewhat winded with the exertion, and Bob assisted him in fixing himself so that he could hold his position with the least exertion, while they listened, intently, for now voices again were heard.

Soon these voices grew louder, there was a rush of feet, and the men came back into the room in haste.

By the looks of their faces Bob knew that something was up.

What did it mean?

"Get out your weapons!" the ringleader of the cohort cried. "If this is an attack we will give them hot shot!"

The men quickly had their pistols in hand, and in another moment, other running feet were heard, the door was thrown open, and into the room bounded Satin Sam, with a couple of men at his back!

Here was a surprise—a stunning surprise.

And it was a joyous one for Big Boots Bob, as can be imagined.

But there was further surprise in store which was sprung at almost the same moment.

Two of the four men in the room wheeled upon the other two, thrusting their revolvers under their noses, and both at the same time exclaimed:

"Up with your hands, coveys!"

There was a howl of rage instantly, and the men at bay became as tigers.

"Traitors!" cried the ringleader. "Take that!" and he fired at one of the men.

Satin Sam had been quicker, however, for he had struck up his arm, and the young detective's lithe top-loaded cane dropped on the man's head, and the man sank suddenly to the floor.

The other crook, too, tried to shoot, but he was seized before he could do so, and, in almost that same instant, there was a surprise from another direction!

Out of the wall, as it seemed, for the room was papered, and the paper had been pasted over the place where the door opened into the shaft that led to

the cellar below; out of the wall, then, with a whoop, leaped Big Boots Bob.

"Great hokus!" he cried. "That was the way to do it, Satin Sam! Hit him another fer luck, jest to please me, won't ye?"

And, following Bob, out came Dick Rice.

By that time the two villains had been made prisoners, and their disguises had been torn from them.

"Philip Randall!" exclaimed Rice. "And Lyman Gunter?"

"The same," assured Satin Sam. "Two of the most infamous wretches unhanged."

He finished their discomfiture by putting handcuffs on them, as he spoke; and that done, he turned to the two men.

"You have done well," he said. "This was what you promised, and you have kept your word. I shall not forget it, and you will be duly rewarded. As for you, prisoners, you know what fate awaits you."

"Yes," said one of the two who had turned traitors, "we chipped in on your side, Satin Sam, and we ain't sorry, fer you are too cool a feller to be sent off in that under-water fashion. If we had done that, this man would have had us by ther necks, fer sure, an' nothin' gained."

"What has been gained, you traitor?" grated Philip Randall.

"Everything," answered Sam.

"Name one thing."

"We have unmasked you."

"And gained nothing. Emeline Kemper is forever lost, now."

"Oh, is she, dear guardian?" asked a sweet voice, and a door opened and a young woman stepped into the room.

"Curses on it!" cried Randall. "It is all up, Gunter!"

"Yes, it looks so," acknowledged that conscienceless confederate.

"It certainly is," assured Satin Sam. "I have cleared up the whole thing in the short time since my release, and you have not even a heeltap left to stand on. Bob, you may step out and call in the police."

"Bet your life I will!" cried the happy Fire Laddie, and he sprang to obey.

At that moment Emeline Kemper, catching sight of Dick Rice, ran and fell into his arms.

There was a sensation for some minutes, when the police came in and the matter was explained to them, and that Big Boots Bob enjoyed it to the full we can well understand. It was greater fun than the biggest fire in New York.

The denouement that followed was the sensation of the day, and all the newspapers made much of it.

Emeline Kemper was heiress to several millions. After her, the next heir was Lyman Gunter. He stood in the good graces of Philip Randall, Emeline's guardian. It was their scheme to have Emeline marry Gunter, who would then come in for the riches, and it was understood that he was to give the guardian a goodly portion.

Emeline, however, was engaged to Dick Rice, and refused to fall in with their dastardly scheme. So they determined to try a new plan. They made her a prisoner in the Randall residence, and found another young woman who looked very much like her to play her role—for a consideration. It was given out that she had disappeared, and it was their intention to murder the personating young woman and have her body discovered.

If that could be done, they believed, it would be accepted that Emeline was dead, and Gunter would come in for the property. He would then force the true Emeline to marry him, or she would be turned

out penniless, and they believed that they could cheat her out of all her rights by refusing to recognize her, since she had been once declared dead. For this purpose it had been planned that the pseudo-Emeline should go to a certain house at a certain hour, where she would be found mysteriously dead.

Even more than this had been attempted. It had been designed to get Satin Sam in the same manner and at the same time, and also Dick Rice, but it has been shown how Sam and the young woman escaped.

As for Rice, the men who were to take care of him made a mistake and got Lyman Gunter instead, and it was he that Big Boots Bob rescued from the room in the burning house on the Bowery. There was so much direct evidence that the execrable rascals were found guilty on short trial, and were given the full penalty of the law for their evil doings.

Dick Rice and the true Emeline were wed, and Big Boots Bob was a special guest at the wedding. The happy couple wanted to do something more for him in the way of preparing him for a start in life than a mere money reward, but the irrepressible engine runner declared that all he wanted was to become a fireman, which now his prestige and good backing would make sure.

Satin Sam, of course, kept faith with the two men who had betrayed their evil leader and saved him, and they commenced life anew as honest men, under the Dandy Detective's admirable guidance.

His own reward came, not so much in the considerable sum that was put in the bank to his credit, as is the honorable mention of the press, the police and the public, from all of whom came such applause as quite satisfied his utmost ambition for a detective's laurels.

THE END.

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